

PRAYER

PRAYER

According to
the Catechisms of the Reformation

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Stenographic Records of Three Seminars
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Foreword

THE TEXT of this book has been established according to the stenographic records made in the course of three seminars which were offered by Professor Karl Barth at Neuchâtel in January, 1947, in January, 1948, and in September, 1949.

It is always a delicate matter to meddle with another person's thought, and when one deals with the professor of Basel, the undertaking calls for still greater prudence.

We have endeavored to follow with fidelity the intricate steps of his exposition, and for this reason we have deemed it necessary to adhere to certain turns of phrase which constantly qualify and enrich his meaning. We have attempted also to preserve his imagery, the naturalness and freshness of his diction, and the spontaneity of movement in his ideas. Thus we have often preferred to retain the homely expressions rather than introduce the academic terms.

We are grateful to Pastor André Perret for the preliminary work that he has accomplished in transcribing the text of the stenographic record, and to Madame Andrée Du Pasquier for the useful notes that she has graciously placed at our disposal.

A. R.

Contents

Introductory Remarks	9
I. Prayer	17
II. Interpretation of the Lord's Prayer According to the Reformers	33
The Invocation	33
The Petitions of the Lord's Prayer	37
The First Three Petitions	42
The Last Three Petitions	55
The Doxology	77

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

BEFORE taking up the subject of prayer itself according to the catechisms of the Reformation, we believe it useful to present several observations which these texts have suggested to us.

1. *The Reformers of the Church prayed.*

The Reformation appears to us as a great whole: a labor of research, thinking, preaching, discussion, polemic, and organization. But it was more than all that. From what we know, it was also an act of continuous prayer, an invocation, and, let us add, an act of men, of certain men, and at the same time a response on the part of God.

We find in Luther's Large Catechism a remarkable passage from which we may cite a few excerpts: "For we know that our defense lies in prayer alone. We are too weak to resist the Devil and his vassals. Let us hold fast to the weapons of the Christian; they enable us to combat the Devil. For what has carried off these great victories over the undertakings of our enemies which the Devil has used to put us in subjection, if not the prayers of certain pious people who rose up as a rampart to protect us? Our enemies may mock at us. But we shall oppose both them and the Devil if we maintain ourselves in prayer and if we persist in

it. For we know that when a Christian prays in this way: 'Dear Father, thy will be done,' God replies to him, 'Dear child, yes, it shall be done in spite of the Devil and of the whole world.'"

There are some mysteries in the events of the sixteenth century, but here we touch upon a point of particular importance. Perhaps the faults and weaknesses that we see at some moments in history are due to the fact that we no longer understand the meaning of words such as these we have just heard from Luther.

2. *The Reformers were of one mind concerning the importance and significance of prayer.*

When the texts of the various catechisms are read and compared, it is possible to distinguish with some clarity the dominant preoccupations of Calvin, Luther, and the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism.

However, it would be difficult, even impossible, to discover contradictions on the matter of faith. One of these men, for example, insists that prayer is obedience to a command of God: man must pray because God wills it. One might suppose that this comes from Calvin. But it is Luther who holds this rigid, almost military idea: God commands, man must obey. Another insists that prayer is founded upon the intercession of Jesus Christ with his Heavenly Father. One might expect this to come from Luther, but it is from Calvin.

Furthermore, Calvin insists upon the necessity of man's addressing himself to God alone, rather than to the saints or to the angels. We recognize again the Genevan Reformer when he speaks of the part played by the Holy Spirit in prayer. On the other hand, it is interesting to note that

prayer is mentioned as an act of gratitude in the Heidelberg Catechism.

Let us also observe that the example and the reality of prayer are identical in all these texts. This fact should be understood in the discussions which persist even today in Germany between Lutherans and Calvinists. Inasmuch as the Reformers were of one mind concerning prayer, they were in fundamental agreement. Now, if men can pray together, they should also be able to take Communion together. For then doctrinal differences can be only of a secondary nature.

3. *What is not to be found in these texts.*

One fact needs to be stressed: these texts do not mention any differences between individual prayer and corporate prayer. For the authors of the various catechisms one thing is clear: they see the Church, *us*, that is to say, the members of a community forming a whole. But they distinguish also among the individuals who constitute this whole. One cannot ask whether it is the Christians who pray, or the Church. There is no alternative, for when the Christians pray, it is the Church; and when the Church prays, it is the Christians. Between these two there can be no opposition.

Perhaps it is a sign of sickness in the Church that questions such as these can arise: How can I, in my room, pray for my spiritual needs? And the Church, on its side, how can it pray? Thereupon, one begins to take a peculiar interest in prayer within the Church and thus in the "liturgical question"! Is this not the sign of a disease?

For the Reformers there is no "liturgical question": one prays in the Church or one prays at home. They are not pre-occupied with drawing a distinction between private and

communal prayer. What interests them is the necessity to pray and to pray well. There is here perhaps a warning and a reminder. Any stress on secondary matters reveals a spiritual weakness.

4. *Another question overlooked in these texts: Must one pray from the heart, or according to a formulary?*

Neither Calvin nor Luther paid heed to this question which preoccupies so many of our contemporaries. They insisted that it is from the heart man must pray. They emphasized sincerity of prayer in opposition to the mumbling of lips. They knew what free prayer is, but they also knew that true prayer cannot be a matter of fantasy; it must be disciplined.

Jesus Christ not only told us to pray, but he also showed us in the "Our Father" how we are to pray. We should do well to hold fast to this rule. There must be affection in prayer, as Calvin says, but this affection may not be for our minds a pretext of vagabondage. The extemporaneous prayers that Calvin used to make at the end of his sermons are remarkable in their majestic uniformity. He did not permit himself disorderly effusions. The same elements always reappear: adoration of the majesty of God and of the Holy Spirit; but they are not clichés.

The Reformers were not glib at prayer, and I do not know whether they would willingly have spoken of the gift of prayer. They say: Pray and pray well; this is what matters. Be content with possessing in the Lord's Prayer a model, but let your prayer arise from the freedom of the heart.

5. *The Reformers do not speak of a difference between explicit prayer (which is exteriorized, at certain times, by*

the enunciation of words) and implicit prayer (which is not expressed in words but lies in sentiments, in a continuous attitude of heart, conscience, and thought).

The “pray constantly” of I Thess. 5:17 is not quoted in any catechism of that period. It would seem that the chief preoccupation of these authors is explicit prayer. However, Calvin says that language is not always necessary. In a general way, it may be stated that according to the explanations of the Reformers themselves—that is, what they say in their writings, their preaching, and their actions—prayer is at once word, thought, and life.

I

Prayer

I

Prayer

WE SHALL examine the subject in three of its aspects: first, the problem of prayer in general; then, prayer viewed as a gift of God; and finally, prayer considered as an act of man.

1. *The problem of prayer.*

In these catechisms what importance is given to prayer? If you glance over them, you will notice that Luther treated first the Commandments, then the Creed, that is, the exposition of faith. Calvin, on the other hand, began with the Creed and then turned to the Commandments. Thus he speaks of faith first and then of obedience.

Here we are, then, we Christians, looked upon as believers, as obedient servants, and as such faced with a new problem: that of prayer. Is it really a new problem? beyond faith and obedience? So it would seem. Calvin says that prayer deals with our life and our relation to the exigencies of this world. The question is as follows: I, who am a Christian, can I really live according to the word of the Gospel and of the Law, according to my faith and in obedience? Shall I be able to live thus in the midst of the necessities of my existence? — Yes, according to the Gospel it is possible in the holiness of obedience to live that which is given us to live, that which we must live. In order to do this, we must listen to what is told us about prayer and ask

God himself to come to our aid, to instruct us, to give us the possibility of walking in this path. Such a quest must be made in order that we may live. Prayer is this quest.

In Luther's Catechism, this situation of man grappling with faith and obedience is closely examined. What is to be said, what is to be done, when one is confronted with the fact that no man obeys the law perfectly, whereas the law exacts perfect obedience, and when one does not perfectly fulfill it, he does not fulfill it at all? However, we are believers, that is, people who have the beginnings of faith. Faith is not something that a man carries about in his pocket as a rightful possession. God says to me, "Put your trust in me, believe in me." And I go forward, I believe; but while going forward, I say, "Come to the help of mine unbelief." Life is there before us with its difficulties and its demands; and the law is also there to claim obedience in spite of our weaknesses, and so are the obstacles which rise up before us. I go forward with a faith that is only a poor beginning, and I am commanded to go ahead, to become perfectly obedient, to continue on this path of faith after I have already taken the first step.

On the one hand, there is our inward life, that of weak and wily men. On the other hand, there is our outward life, in this world, with all its enigmas and difficulties. There is also the judgment of God, who encounters us and says to us at every moment, "This is not enough." I may even reach the point of asking myself: "Underneath it all, am I a Christian? My faith being small and my obedience slight, of what meaning are these words: 'I believe, I obey'?" Deep is the abyss. The core of our being is put to question at the very moment we believe and obey as well as we can. In this situation (which is the same for every

Christian) prayer means going toward God, asking him to give us what we lack—strength, courage, serenity, prudence—asking him to teach us how to obey the law and accomplish his commandments, and then that he may instruct us how to continue in believing and believing yet more, and that he may renew our faith.

Such a request can be made solely to God. As Calvin has said, it is a question of honor which we owe to His divinity. It is an honor due to Him who has revealed himself to us by his Word (the Heidelberg Catechism). For it is the word of God that maintains us in this situation wherein prayer becomes a necessity.



Prayer means that we address ourselves to him who has already spoken to us in the Gospel and in the Law. We find ourselves face to face with him when we are tormented by the imperfection of our obedience and the discontinuity of our faith. Because of him we are in distress. He alone is able to heal us of it. In order to ask him to do so, we pray.

Calvin points out that we are not alone in this difficult position. We have sisters and brothers in Christ, and from them we may also receive guidance and encouragement. Yet it is only a ministry, a dispensation of the wealth of God, that men can bring to the misery of our situation. God himself bestows upon them an honor when he uses them to communicate his benefits to us, and thereby he obligates us to them. Prayer cannot therefore in any way estrange us from men; it can only unite us since it involves a matter that concerns us all.

Before praying, then, I first seek the company of other men. I know that all of you are facing the same difficulties as I. Let us therefore consult with one another and mutually

give what we are able. However, we cannot put our trust in fellow creatures. There may be a few men capable of telling us what we need, or at least of giving us certain indications. But the gift itself can come from God alone. We cannot pray to men, no more to the saints than to the others.

In the sixteenth century it was important to say that the saints of the Church, or any of the dead, are unable to help us. Perhaps, however, such a categorical statement might be questioned. I am not so sure that the saints of the Church are unable to come to our aid. I mean the Reformers, for example, and the saints who are alive on earth today. We live in communion with the Church of the past, and from it we receive help. Yet, one fact is certain: that neither the living nor the dead can be for us what God himself is to us, namely, a help in that great distress which is ours in the face of the Gospel and the Law. The same thing may be said in respect to the angels, who can help us but cannot be invoked.

Thus for the Reformers everything was reduced to this question: How is it possible for me to have an encounter with God? I have heard his word, I wish sincerely to listen to it, and yet here I am in my insufficiency. The Reformers were not unaware of other difficulties, but they knew that such hindrances are all implicit in the following reality: I stand before God with my desires, my thoughts, my misery; I must live with him, for to live means nothing other than to live with God. Here I am, caught between the exigencies of life, both small and great, and the necessity of prayer. The Reformers tell us the first thing is to pray.

2. *Prayer a gift of God.*

Prayer is a grace, an offer of God.

We shall not begin, as the Reformers did, with a description of what man does when he prays. Obviously he does

something, he acts; to understand this action, however, we must begin with the end, that is, we must first consider answer to prayer. We may be surprised at this, for, from a logical standpoint, we should ask first, "What is prayer?" And only afterward, "Do we receive an answer when we pray?" Now for the Reformers the basic and vital point is this certitude: God does answer prayer. That is the first thing we must know. Calvin says it explicitly: we obtain what we request. Prayer is grounded upon this assurance.



Let us approach the subject from the given fact that God answers. He is not deaf, he listens; more than that, he acts. He does not act in the same way whether we pray or not. Prayer exerts an influence upon God's action, even upon his existence. This is what the word "answer" means.

In Question 129 of the Heidelberg Catechism it is stated that the answer to our prayer is more certain than our awareness of the things that we request. It seems there is nothing more sure than the feeling of our desires, but this Catechism says that God's answer is still more certain. We too must have this inward assurance. Perhaps we doubt the sincerity of our prayer and the worth of our request. But one thing is beyond doubt: it is the answer that God gives. Our prayers are weak and poor. Nevertheless, what matters is not that our prayers be forceful, but that God listens to them. That is why we pray.

How does God answer us? Here we must recall the article on Jesus Christ in Calvin's Catechism. We cannot better understand God's answer than by keeping in mind this thought: Jesus Christ is our brother, we belong to him; he is the head of the body of which we are the members; and, at the same time, he is the Son of God, of God him-

self. It is he who has been given to us as mediator and advocate before God. We are not separated from God, and, more important still, God is not separated from us. We may be without God, but God is not without men. This we must know, and this is what matters. Facing the godless, there is God, who is never without men, because humanity — all of us — is in the presence of God. If God knows man, if he sees him and judges him, it is always through the person of Jesus Christ, his own Son, who has been obedient and is the object of his delight. By Jesus Christ, humanity is in the presence of God. God looks at Christ, and it is through him that he looks at us. We have, therefore, a representative before God.

Calvin even says that we pray through the mouth of Jesus Christ, who speaks for us because of what he has been, because of what he has suffered in obedience and faithfulness to his Father. And we ourselves pray as though with his mouth, inasmuch as he gives us access and audience, and intercedes for us. Thus, fundamentally, our prayer is already made even before we formulate it. When we pray, we can only return to that prayer which was uttered in the person of Jesus Christ and which is constantly repeated because God is not without man.

God is the Father of Jesus Christ, and that very man, Jesus Christ, has prayed, and he is praying still. Such is the foundation of our prayer in Jesus Christ. It is as if God himself has pledged to answer our request because all our prayers are summed up in Jesus Christ; God cannot fail to answer, since it is Jesus Christ who prays.

The fact that God yields to the petitions of man, that he alters his intentions and follows the bent of man's prayers, is not a sign of weakness. In his own majesty and in the

splendor of his might, he has willed and yet wills it so. He desires to be the God who has been man in Jesus Christ. Therein lies his glory, his omnipotence. He does not then impair himself by yielding to our prayer; on the contrary, it is in so doing that he shows his greatness.

If God himself wishes to enter into fellowship with man and be close to him as a father is to his child, he does not thereby weaken his might. God cannot be greater than he is in Jesus Christ. If God answers our prayer, it is not then only because he listens to us and increases our faith (the efficacy of prayer has sometimes been explained in this manner), but because he is God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God whose word has been made flesh.

Let us now come back to Luther, who invites us, nay, who commands us, to pray. If we do not pray, we fail to realize that we are in the presence of God. We cannot recognize what he is. Such an attitude would render us incapable of grasping the fact that God meets us in Jesus Christ. Now, when we are aware of this mystery, we must pray. Jesus Christ is there — he, the Son of God; and we who belong to him — we, for whom there is no other possibility than to follow him, to speak through his mouth — are with him. We have found the right road, and now it behooves us to walk in it. On this path, the Gospel and the Law, the promise and the commandments of God, are one and the same thing. God opens this road to us; he commands us to pray. Thus it is not possible to say, "I shall pray," or, "I shall not pray," as if it were an act according to our own good pleasure. To be a Christian and to pray are one and the same thing; it is a matter that cannot be left to our caprice. It is a need, a kind of breathing necessary to life.

The Heidelberg Catechism is still more precise. It affirms that prayer is quite simply the first act of thanksgiving toward God. The word "thanksgiving" * is more appropriate than gratitude because it means acting according to what we know has been given. Every man who knows God must return thanks to him. He recognizes what God is, what God has done for him in Jesus Christ; he enters into the condition that has been given us in Christ. And in this condition man prays.

Luther even adds that God would be angered if we did not pray, for we should be despising the gift that he has bestowed on us. Since it is God himself who tells us to pray, how could we neglect to do so? The Reformers remind us that prayer is not a matter of convenience; it is, in the life of a Christian, a necessary and essential act, which must come by itself.

Furthermore, God, since he is our God, causes our prayer to proceed from his grace. Wherever there is the grace of God, man prays. God works in us, for we know not how to pray as we ought. It is the Spirit of God that incites us and enables us to pray in a fitting manner. We are not skilled to judge whether we are worthy or capable of praying, or whether we have sufficient zeal to pray. Grace in itself is the answer to this question. When we are comforted by the grace of God, we begin to pray with or without words.

* [Translator's Note] This is a paraphrase of the author's use of the French word *reconnaissance*, which cannot be accurately rendered in English: "*Le mot de reconnaissance est plus clair que celui de gratitude, car il signifie: agir selon ce que nous connaissons (reconnaître). Tout homme qui connaît Dieu doit être reconnaissant envers lui. Il reconnaît ce que Dieu est, ce qu'il a fait pour lui en Jésus-Christ; il entre dans la position qui nous est donnée en Christ; et dans cette position, l'homme prie.*"

God also points out a way that will lead us to prayer. Prayer is neither an arbitrary act nor a step to be taken blindly. When we pray, we cannot venture according to whim in this or that direction, with just any sort of request. For God commands man to follow him and to take the place that he has assigned to him. It is a matter ruled by God, not by our own initiative.

How shall we pray? It was not by chance that Jesus gave us a formulary in the Lord's Prayer to instruct men how to pray aright. God himself teaches us how we are to pray, for we have so many things to ask! And we think that what we desire is always so important! Besides, it is necessary for us to believe this. But in order that our act may become true prayer, we must accept the offer that God tenders us. We cannot pray by ourselves, and if we have deceptions in prayer, we must accept God's showing us the way of true prayer. He therefore starts us, with all our needs and problems, on a certain path by which we can bring everything to him; but we must take that path. This discipline is necessary for us. If it is absent, we must not be surprised that we cry out in a void, instead of finding ourselves engaged in a prayer that has already been heard.

Let us be content with possessing this formula of the Lord's Prayer, as the Reformers say, so that in praying thus we may serve our apprenticeship in true prayer. Calvin justly declares that in prayer also we cannot act as strangers, but as citizens of the City of God we must accept its constitution, its law, and its order. Only under this condition can we expect a hearing and a reply to the problems of our life.

Because he is our God in Jesus Christ, God himself compels us to take in his presence an attitude that at first sight

appears to be rash and bold. He obliges us to meet him with a certain audacity: "Thou hast made us promises, thou hast commanded us to pray; and here I am, coming, not with pious ideas or because I like to pray (perhaps I do not like to pray), and I say to thee what thou hast commanded me to say, 'Help me in the necessities of my life.' Thou must do so; I am here." Luther is right: the position of a man at prayer requires utter humility as well as an attitude of boldness and virility. There is a good kind of humility; it consists in accepting, through liberty, this place that we have in Jesus vis-à-vis God. If we are sure of our attitude, and if we do not come to God merely on account of our good intentions, then this liberty is self-evident.

Thus God's will in our favor and his mercy in Jesus are decisive elements in the matter now at hand. The Heidelberg Catechism, in Question 117, affirms that our sure foundation rests on the fact that, because of Jesus Christ, God can answer our prayer in spite of our unworthiness.

3. *Prayer an act of man.*

According to the foregoing considerations, prayer is an altogether simple act by which we accept and use the divine offer; an act in which we obey this command of the majestic grace that identifies itself with the will of God. To obey grace — to give thanks — means that prayer is also an act on the part of man, who knows himself to be a sinner and calls upon the grace of God. He finds himself confronted by the Gospel, the Law, and the weakness of his faith, even if he is not conscious of it. We experience at once a certain sadness and a certain joy. But we have not yet understood that we are sinners or that we do not perfectly realize obedience. We do not yet know that we are under a veil. It must be removed. When we pray, our human con-

dition is unveiled to us, and we know then that we are in this distress and also in that hope. It is God who places us in this situation; but at the same time he comes to our aid. Prayer is thus man's response when he understands his distress and knows that help will come to him.

It is not permissible to consider prayer as a good work to be done, as a pious, nice, and pretty duty to be performed. Prayer cannot be for us a means of creating something, of making a gift to God and to ourselves; we are in the position of a man who can only receive, who is obliged to speak now to God, since he has no one else to whom he may address himself. Luther has said that we must all be destitute, for we are faced by a great void and have everything to receive and learn from God.

Prayer as an act of man cannot be a gossiping, a series of phrases or mumblings. The Reformers insisted also on that point. They had in the Roman Church many examples of the sort of prayer against which they were fighting. The matter is simple and important for us too, even if we are not Roman Catholics: prayer must be an act of affection; it is more than a question of using the lips, for God asks the allegiance of our hearts. If the heart is not in it, if it is only a form which is carried out more or less correctly, what is it then? Nothing! All prayers offered solely by the lips are not only superfluous, but they are also displeasing to God; they are not only useless, but they are offensive to God. At this point it is also important to remark with Calvin that prayer uttered in a language that we do not understand or which the congregation at prayer does not understand is a mockery to God, a perverse hypocrisy, for the heart cannot

be in it. We must think and speak in a comprehensible tongue, in a language which has meaning for us.

Let our prayer not be offered according to our good pleasure; otherwise there would be then on our part inordinate desires. Let it be patterned after the rule given by Him who knows our needs better than we ourselves. He has directed us first to submit ourselves to him in order that we may present to him our requests. So that we may conform to this order, we must eliminate in our prayers all questions like this: Does God listen to us? On this point Calvin is categorical: "Such a prayer is not prayer." Doubt is not permitted, for it goes without saying that we shall be heard. Even before we pray we must assume the attitude of a man who has been heard.

We are not free to pray or not to pray, or to pray only when we feel so inclined, for prayer is not an act that comes naturally to us. It is a grace, and we can expect this grace only through the Holy Spirit. This grace is there, with God and his word in Jesus Christ. If we say yes to all that, if we receive what God gives, then everything is done, everything is settled, not on account of our good pleasure, but by the freedom we have in obeying him.

Above all, let us not begin by believing that man is passive, that he is in a sort of *farniente* ["do nothing"], in an armchair, and that he can say, "The Holy Spirit will pray for me." Never! Man is impelled to pray. He must do it. Prayer is an act, as well as a supplication to the Lord that he put us in this frame of mind which is agreeable to him. This is one of the facets of the problem of grace and liberty: we work but at the same time we very well know that God wills to fulfill our work; we are in this human liberty which is not crushed by the liberty of God; we allow the Holy Spirit to

act, and yet, during this time, our mind and our heart do not sleep. Such is prayer when it is viewed as an act of man.



Our participation in the work of God is the action that consists in giving our allegiance to this work. It is a great thing to preach, to believe, and to fulfill our small obedience to God's commandments. But in all these forms of obedience and faith it is prayer that puts us in rapport with God and permits us to collaborate with him. God wishes us to live with him, and we, on our side, reply, "Yes, Father, I wish to live with thee." And then he says: "Pray, call me; I am listening to you. I shall live and reign with you."

The Reformation was not made without these men named Calvin, Luther, and still others. God was laboring in allowing them to participate in his work. It was not by the brilliance of their virtues, wisdom, or piety that he accomplished his work with them. It was by prayer, at once humble and audacious. And it is in prayer thus understood that we are invited to participate, alone with God and in the community. This prayer is at once an act of humility and an act of triumph. Such an act is required of us because we are given the power to perform it.

II

Interpretation of the Lord's Prayer According to the Reformers

II

Interpretation of the Lord's Prayer According to the Reformers *

THE INVOCATION

WE ARE invited to pray. That presupposes all we have said before on prayer in general. However, this is the important fact: we are exhorted to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven." It is Jesus Christ who invites us to address ourselves in prayer to God and to call him our Father; Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, who has made himself our brother and makes us his brothers. He takes us with him in order to associate us with himself, to place us beside him so that we may live and act as his brothers and as the members of his body. He says to us, "Follow me."



The Lord's Prayer is not just any form of prayer to be used by just anybody. It presupposes "us": "Our Father"! A Father who is a father to us in a most particular fashion. This "us" is created by the order that Jesus gave to follow him. It implies the communion of man praying with Jesus Christ, his existence in the brotherhood of the sons of God.

* At the beginning of his lectures, Professor Barth warned his auditors that he would not rest content with a historical résumé of what the Reformers have said concerning the Lord's Prayer. But he added that after having read with care the texts of Calvin and Luther, he allowed himself a certain liberty with them while he assimilated their thought.

Jesus Christ invites, permits, commands man to join him, especially in his intercession with God his Father. Jesus Christ invites us, commands us, and allows us to speak with him to God, to pray with him his own prayer, to be united with him in the Lord's Prayer. Therefore he invites us to adore God, pray to God, and praise God with one mouth and one soul, with him, united to him.

This "us" signifies also the communion of the man who prays with all those who are in his company and who, like him, are invited to pray; with those who have received the same invitation, the same commandment, the same permission to pray beside Jesus Christ. We pray "Our Father" in the communion of this assembly, of this congregation which we call the Church (if we take this expression in its original meaning of *ecclesia*, the congregation).

But even while we are in the communion of the saints, in the *ecclesia* of those who are brought together by Jesus Christ, we are also in communion with those who do not yet pray, perhaps, but for whom Jesus Christ prays, since he prays for mankind as a whole. Mankind is the object of this intercession, and we ourselves enter into this communion with the whole of mankind. When Christians pray, they are, so to speak, the substitutes for all those who do not pray; and in this sense they are in communion with them in the same manner as Jesus Christ has entered into solidarity with man the sinner, with a lost mankind.

"*Our Father*," thou who hast begotten us, procreated us by thy Word, by thy Spirit; thou who art our Father because thou art our Creator, the Lord of the covenant which thou hast been pleased to make with men. Thou who hast begun in and with our creation and who art the end of our existence.

Our Father, thou who hast made thyself responsible for

our whole existence, temporal and eternal; God the Father, thou whose glory is our heritage and to whom we have free access as children to their father.

Our Father, thou who by nature art ready simply to listen to us, to answer us. . . . But we forget it always. . . . We may deny God, but he cannot forget us, nor can he deny us. Being Father, he is faithful by nature. His superiority and his good will toward us are unchangeable.

This is what God is for us. But we must admit that we have no right to call him Father, to be his children, to address him in this manner. He is our Father, and we are his children by virtue of the natural relationship existing between him and Jesus Christ, by virtue of this Fatherhood and this Sonship which were made real in the person of Jesus Christ; and for us they are made real in him. We are his children, he is our Father, by virtue of this new birth realized at Christmas, on Good Friday, at Easter, and fulfilled at the moment of our baptism. It is a new birth, that is to say, a new existence, really new, a life quite different from the one that can be born of our human possibilities, of our own merits. "God our Father" means "Our Father of mercy." We are and always shall be prodigal sons who can claim no other right than that which is given us in the person of Jesus Christ.

This does not weaken what has been said of the divine Fatherhood. The clarity and the certitude, the very greatness and majesty of our Father appear in the fact that we find ourselves before him without power, without merit, without proper faith, and empty-handed. Yet, in Christ we are the children of God. The reality of this sonship would not be more certain if there could be added to it anything whatsoever coming from us. The divine reality alone is the fullness of all reality.

Jesus Christ is the donor and the warrant of the divine Fatherhood and of our filiality. It is the reason for which this Fatherhood and this filiality are incomparably superior to any other, to any relationship suggested to us by the words "father," "son," "children." These human bonds are not the original, of which the other would be the image or symbol. The original, the true fatherhood, the true filiality are in these ties which God has created between himself and us. Everything which exists among us is merely the image of this original filiality. When we call God our Father, we do not fall into symbolism; on the contrary, we are in the full reality of these two words: "father" and "son."

"Who art in heaven." Heaven! It is a part of the created world, the portion which is above, the unapproachable and incomprehensible part of creation. This means: God, who is higher than heaven, who is beyond it, and who is also the Father of Jesus Christ, the one who loves the world in Jesus Christ. If one says of God, "He is limitless, incomprehensible, free, sovereign, eternal, omnipotent, transcendent," these expressions do not derive their exact meaning from an idea, from an abstraction, as if one wished to define the contrary of what is limited, comprehensible, and temporal. All these qualities draw their true meaning from the goodness of the Heavenly Father, who has made himself our Father in Jesus Christ. Herein lies the meaning of his transcendence, of his existence beyond heaven. No philosophy, be it that of Aristotle, Kant, or Plato, can reach the transcendence of God, for the philosophers go only as far as the limits of the incomprehensible, of that which is superior to us. All philosophy turns around the subject of heaven. The Gospel, on the other hand, speaks to us of him who is

in heaven, beyond heaven. Neither the idealist nor the existentialist can bring us to the reality of God, to his transcendence, which is quite different from spirit, from invisibility. His transcendence is demonstrated, revealed, and actualized in Jesus Christ, who is the profundity of his omnipotent mercy.

He is in heaven, on his throne. That is his supreme existence. He is there facing our desires, our needs great and small, our ideals and principles, our wisdom and our stupidity, our humanity and our animality. There is the Judge, the King who disposes of us, who sometimes rules against us, but in any case over us always. He is ever the same and yet never the same, because he is always new every morning. He is present with us at every instant, and he is eternal only by being present with us. He is free grace and gracious freedom, the person to whom all is submitted, all is entrusted, and in whose hands all can and must serve, have served, and will serve. He is, in a few words, the one whom we address not by our own initiative, but because we are invited, called, to do so. We have the freedom to come to him. This freedom is given to us; it is not of ourselves, it is not natural. It is the freedom of the children of God, the freedom of the Word and of the Spirit.



THE PETITIONS OF THE LORD'S PRAYER

First let us attempt to consider the petitions as a whole. Let us notice that their order is, in a certain sense, analogous to that of the Ten Commandments. There is a clear difference between the first three and the last three. The first three correspond to the first four Commandments, and the last three to Commandments five through ten.

The first three petitions deal with the glory of God; there the Lord's Prayer begins. Thus we are permitted, even commanded, to take interest in God's cause, to pray that this cause of God — his Name, his Kingdom, his Will — may be victorious, so that it may reach its fulfillment. In Jesus Christ, God has manifested himself as a God who, while being perfectly free and self-sufficient, yet does not wish to be alone. He does not wish to act, exist, live, labor, work, strive, vanquish, reign, and triumph without man. He does not wish, then, for his cause to be his alone; he wishes it to be also the cause of man.

Are there any real atheists, men without God? In any case, even if there are men without God, there is, from the Christian viewpoint, no God without men. It is most important for us to understand this. God has been with us; he is with us: *Emmanuel*! He permits us, he commands us to pray, as we are invited to do in these first three requests, for the success of his cause. He invites us to participate in his work, in the government of the Church, of the world. If we pray: "Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done," we place ourselves at God's side, nothing less than that. God invites us to join his designs and his action. And let us note that this invitation comes at the beginning and is repeated at the end, in the doxology.

On these first three requests hang the freedom, the joy, the alacrity, and the certitude of the other petitions. All our entreaties presuppose that we ask to participate in God's cause. Whoever refused to do so would have no interest in this cause, nor would he know how to pray either for the forgiveness of his sins or for his daily bread; he would not understand what it is all about. We can live with God only when we are in agreement with his designs, with his cause, which includes ours and all the others. If not, it is as though

we wished to stand in mid-air. We must have ground on which to walk, and in prayer we walk on the ground of these first three petitions. We must not be surprised that many prayers resound in a void and that they are neither listened to nor answered. However, all would be very simple if we understood that we must begin with the beginning and that we cannot pray in any other way.

The last three petitions concern us directly, with sharp actuality. It is a question of our comfort, our own good pleasure, our physical as well as spiritual and celestial salvation. Because in Jesus Christ God has united our cause (the major and the minor problems of our life) to his cause, we are permitted, nay commanded, to appeal now with simplicity on our behalf. And here all our life is at stake. It is not only a permission but an order to deposit with God and entrust to him all our baggage (for one arrives with a very complicated collection of baggage when one has traveled through this world). We can entrust to God this baggage, which is at once temporal, material, secular, eternal, Christian, ecclesiastical, and theological.

In Jesus Christ the human being is revealed. In him it becomes the creature par excellence (*kat' exochēn*), which cannot be, which cannot exist, or which cannot act alone. It cannot live without God, nor can it eat, drink, love, or hate; it cannot justify itself or save itself; nor can it be sad or gay; nor can it hope or despair, succeed or fail. Thanks to God we exist among his creatures. Thus, truly, there are no men without God. There are some individuals who entertain this idea, who believe themselves atheists; it is an *idée fixe*. But that changes absolutely nothing; man as such is not without God. He may behave himself as a naughty child who cries and scolds his mother. But his mother is there.

This is not a philosophical idea. I do not know whether one could explain, in a manner that might be convincing outside of faith in Jesus Christ, this affirmation: there is no man without God. But as soon as we have understood Jesus Christ, we have understood man, his nature, and his function, which is inseparable from God. Now, because there is no man without God (atheism is a ridiculous invention), God commands us to pray, God participates in our affairs and in our needs, in our cares and in our distresses, in our expectations, in everything. When we pray, "Give us . . . our . . . bread," we do no other than to recognize what is the reality of our life; we admit that which is, namely, that we are nothing without him. And this command, this invitation to pray, to unite our cause with his, is a simple recognition of that which is: God invites and commands us to put ourselves beside Jesus Christ, who deigned to assume manhood. He was God, and he made himself man. Thus he interested himself in all these great things, and especially in all these small things, that preoccupy us.

The cause of man, that is, his material needs and his salvation, comes after God's. But notice that in it there is no question of optional requests. The first petitions would certainly not exist were it not for the last three, which are as indispensable as the others. The man who would not continue to pray for the last three would not be praying with sincerity, for he too must have his place, since it is a question of his own cause, of all that he is, with his temperament, his nerves, and all the rest. He is not only there for God's cause; he needs must bring forward his own also, while making it fit into God's. It would therefore be dangerous to omit the last three petitions, for then there would be, on the one hand, an ecclesiastical, theological, meta-

physical sphere, and, on the other hand, a sphere concerned with money, sex, business, and social relationships. There would thus be two compartments. Now, whether you wish it or not, there is only one. Nothing is so pernicious as the illusion of two compartments. You know how often ministers imagine that there are the two: this dialectic between God's cause and ours. However, they are linked together; we pray for the two as a whole. Such is the case because it is Jesus Christ who invites us to pray with him, because in him these two causes are one. Therefore it is important to understand in the Lord's Prayer the difference between these two parts, but also their unity.

Let us remember that in his Small Catechism Luther has emphasized this paradox in an interesting and enlightening manner: God acts in the direction that our prayer takes; he hallows his name, his Kingdom comes, his will is done, he gives us our bread, he forgives us; he does all this before we pray. We address ourselves to Him who has listened to us even before we say anything to him. Let us not forget this—and Luther was right when he said it—it is Jesus Christ who prays, and we join in his intercession. It is he whom God hears, and his prayer is heard since the beginning of the world, from eternity to eternity. Everything is already in order. In the first section of this work I have stressed, in accordance with Calvin and Luther, the foundations of prayer and God's response. Let us begin by understanding this: We are heard in the name of Jesus Christ. Everything is already there when we address ourselves to God.

As Luther says on the Lord's Prayer, we must take part in God's action. God is busy at work for his glory and for our salvation; and we ourselves must benefit from his ac-

tion, not as spectators, nor by giving ourselves the role of indispensable collaborators, but by praying, by concerning ourselves with him, with what he is doing. Therein is the true collaboration. He invites us to address ourselves to him while understanding that his cause and ours are intimately united, that our cause is comprehended within his. We come, then, as men, and we are there before him, disposed to live in the wholeness of these two causes. All is contained in God's liberty, in his sovereignty. It is not a sort of necessity (*anagkē*), of fatality; but God is our Father, and he wills that we be with him.

THE FIRST THREE PETITIONS

"Hallowed be thy name."

When we speak of God, the name (*onoma*) signifies the glorious representation of God in the created world. Not simply and immediately identified with God himself, the name is the representation of God. Because the created world is the theater for God's glory (Calvin), the world is only a creature; it can become (but not in a philosophical sense), under certain conditions which do not depend upon itself, the bearer of God's name. There may happen to be in the world something like signs of God's name which indicate the presence of God himself. If such is the case, one may say that, like advertisements in our cities, these signs are not invisible, but they are illuminated by the revelation.

Our eyes are opened for us to see them. The world is God's world. This is why his name can be written upon it. The universe can sing his praise. Everything which is the creation of God can bear the name of its Creator.

Now let us ask the question: Is this name visible? Is it revealed? Are these signs illuminated? Are our eyes and

ears opened? Is this name hallowed? We understand that this is an accomplishment not in the realm of possibility for the creature, which is of itself unable to become the bearer of God's name. The world as such has not the power to reveal God; and man as such is incapable of receiving a revelation, either by his eyes, his ears, or his understanding. It is God who knows how to speak of God (Pascal).^{*} In an act both objective and subjective, accomplished by himself, God causes himself to be seen, is seen, recognized, and appreciated, and we are permitted to live in this world in his presence, while knowing him, while recognizing him. This act of God becomes real for us in prayer.

The petition, "Hallowed be thy name," implies that God's name is known to him who prays. One does not pray for something which one does not know. This presupposes that God's name is already hallowed (Luther). Thus, in the special situation of those who repeat the "Our Father" with Jesus Christ, we wish to obey the command to follow him also in prayer. And while we are praying with Jesus Christ, we are not ignorant of the hallowing of God's name in the past and in the present.

This prayer is then answered before we formulate it. We should not be Christians praying with Jesus Christ if our prayer meant that we know nothing of this hallowing. In fact, we pray in order that God's action, which is already taking place, may reach its end.

We must therefore transcribe these words, "Hallowed be thy name," in this way: "Thy name is already hallowed." Such a presupposition is the basis of prayer. Our Father, in heaven, thou hast spoken to us. In thy Son thou hast made thyself Word; thou hast made thyself perceptible and ac-

^{*} [Translator's Note] The original reads: "*C'est Dieu qui parle bien de Dieu.*"

cessible to us in the flesh, in this world. The signs of thy name are not lacking illumination. We are not alone in this world. Thou hast taken a human face, which thou showest to us, and through it we can understand what thou sayest to us. We do not live in a world without God.

Thy prophets and thy apostles are on the same level as our life. We listen to them. Through thy Church, the congregation of those whom thou hast called and whom thou continuest to gather — thy Church, which lives on the earth and which has survived for so many centuries, in the midst of so much upheaval, in terror and weakness — in spite of all there is to be said of its faults, through it and its work we have heard thy voice.

We are baptized, we exist in this Church among thy children, being ourselves thy children; we exist among thy missionaries, among those whom thou hast charged to announce thy word, and one cannot be a child of God without being a missionary. We have the freedom to believe, to will, and to obey. This means that the world — this world in which we live — and our own life with its limitations, its encumbrances, its difficulties, its complications and those of our neighbor, cannot remain for us an absolute mystery. There is much mystery, but we do not live in an absolute mystery; we are not surrounded by nothingness. The doctrine of Sartre and Heidegger is not true, for it sinks back into paganism. We know that in this world, in this human state, in this history, there is one thing certain: the signs of thy presence are luminous; Jesus Christ has died and risen for us, and not only for us, but for the whole world. Therefore, the hope of mankind rests upon this fact: God has loved the world. Such is the reality shown by the death and resurrection of the Lord. We live in the memory of it and in the expectation of the general resurrection. It is in this

sense that we say, "God's name is already hallowed." This is the Christian position. The key of the mystery is in our hands.

Let us go farther. Because the key is given to us, because God's name is already hallowed, we have all the more reason to pray: "Hallowed be thy name." That means: May it be given to us and to the world, to this world which is neither worse nor better than we are, in the midst of which we creatures have the advantage of knowing thee, of being called to thy service — may it be given to us to make use of thine incomparable offer; may it not be in vain that thou hast spoken to us in thy Son; may thy Church know how to put its existence to work; may it be liberated from all Romanizing reaction and from all impetuous Americanism, from fear and faintheartedness, from the spirit of pride, from flippancy. May we stop leafing through the Bible instead of reading it. May we moderate a little our habit of quoting the Bible instead of living with it and letting it speak. May we pray that the Bible will not cease holding our attention. May the Bible not begin to make us yawn, and thy word, in all its parts, not become a boring matter in our minds and in our mouths; may it not become a bad sermon, a bad catechism, a bad theology. All these remarks are very simple, but also quite necessary.

Luther has explained at length that this hallowing must manifest itself in preaching. A bad sermon is the opposite of this hallowing. May God's word become anew for us each day the word of God. May it not be a truth, a principle, something which one places on the table, but a living person, the great mystery and the great simplicity. And may the signs of this word of God, of this name of God, be made visible through us, in the midst of us, by the severity and the

serenity of our lives, of our customs, and of our ethics. We pray so that we may receive the power to show this great joy and this great peace of which we so often speak. May this joy and this peace be noticeable. We pray in order that the Christian arrogance and ignorance and unbelief with which we daily dishonor thee may be a bit arrested, a little suppressed.

May this key which has been put in our hands be turned ever so slightly so that the door can one day be opened. Herein is the hallowing of thy name. We see that there is reason to pray for these benefits and this fulfillment, so that what must still be done may be accomplished, although it cannot be done by us. In order that all this may be brought about, God himself must intervene; his cause is at stake. We who are responsible are so ill-qualified to sustain this cause. How overwhelming it is for us to be responsible in this enterprise, and how absolutely necessary it is for God himself to intervene in order that we may not be among those foolish virgins who had no oil!



"Thy kingdom come."

We must go a little further than the Reformers, who have not discerned here or elsewhere the eschatological character of the reality of God's Kingdom. We shall, therefore, give a slightly corrected version of their doctrine.

The Kingdom of God in the New Testament is both the life and the purpose of the world according as they agree with the intentions of the Creator. It is the efficacious and definitive shield against the threat which followed and had to follow sin, against the fatal danger, the annihilation

which lay in wait for the world because the world is only a creature. The Kingdom of God is the final victory over sin. It is the reconciliation of the world to God (II. Cor. 5:19). And here is the consequence of this reconciliation: a new world, a new aeon, a new heaven, and a new earth, which are new because they are surrounded by the peace of God.

God's Kingdom is the justice of God, the justice of the Creator, of the Lord, who justifies and triumphs. The end and purpose of the world is the coming of the Kingdom: "Thy kingdom come." It is clear that we are again confronted by an accomplishment which is infinitely beyond our possibilities, since all that we are, all that we can do, even under the most favorable conditions, is threatened by the same danger. We ourselves have need of this liberation, this victory, this reconciliation, this renewal. The coming of the Kingdom is totally independent of our powers. We are as incapable of doing something toward its coming as creation itself, which is the replica of what we are and of what we are able to do. But it is for us an object of prayer. God alone, who has created the world, can complete it in this act of accomplishment, in this justification of himself and of his cross. It concerns the peace and the justice of a world which is brought to its perfection; and that can be only the result of his work. We must therefore pray: "Thy kingdom come!" Ring this bell to make known the hour of the event.

But saying to God, "Thy kingdom come," presupposes that he who so prays knows this Kingdom, this life, this justice, this newness, this reconciliation; he knows that all this is not foreign to him. He must know it, and when he prays in these words, the Kingdom must already have come.

We find ourselves once more in this extraordinary situation of those who are praying the "Our Father" in the brotherhood of Jesus Christ and of his own. "Thy kingdom come" is the same as saying: "Thy Kingdom is already come; thou hast already established it in our midst." "The kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17:21). Thou hast fulfilled all in Jesus Christ. Thou, God the Father, hast reconciled the world to thyself in Jesus Christ.

Saint Paul does not speak of this reconciliation as of a future event. He says, "He reconciled." All this is done. In the person of Jesus Christ thou hast definitively destroyed sin and all its consequences. In him thou hast abolished all foreign and hostile powers: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). Thou hast eliminated the fatal danger under the threat of which we were living. Thou, God, hast been in Jesus Christ the new man who will not die any more. All this is done. In him thy Kingdom has been present in this world, in the depth, in the totality of his glory, without any attenuation or reticence. In Jesus Christ the world has reached its end and its purpose. Therefore, the last day, the judgment, the resurrection of the dead, all this is already fulfilled in him. It is not only an event to be awaited, it is behind us. We must understand that in him it is also a past event. When the Church speaks of Jesus Christ, when it proclaims his word, when it believes in the Gospel, when it goes out to the pagans to make known this Gospel, when it prays to God, it looks backward to its Lord, who has already come. It remembers Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost. Those are not ordinary historical events to which we would give a mere religious significance (telling ourselves: that is all very well, but indeed that means nothing). No! They are not nothing. They are all that has happened and is behind us.

We proclaim the word made flesh, and we announce the Kingdom of God which has come. When the Church is not jubilant, when it is not sure of its significance, it cannot be insistent and it is not insistent. A sad and gloomy Church is not the Church! For the Church is built upon Him who has been made flesh, upon him who has come to say the last word (not the next to the last). This last word has already been uttered. We live upon this event. There is nothing more in it to be changed. We cannot turn back time, whose beginning is Christmas and Easter.

What does this mean when we understand it, when we live it? This implies that we have the greater reason to pray: "Thy kingdom come!" Here is no contradiction. He who believes these things to be true knows it well. This is why he prays.

Furthermore, it means that this great movement of God in favor of man which began with Christmas, with Easter, and with Pentecost must be recaptured, in order that it not be merely an event behind us, because we live not only by looking backward, but also by looking ahead. It must come, the future must bear the marks of the past, our past must become our future, and the Lord, who has come, must come again.

We pray for the removal of this covering which now conceals all things, as the cloth which covers this table [here Karl Barth indicates a table covered by a cloth]. The table is underneath [he raps on the table]. You hear it. But you do not see it. You have only to remove the cloth to see it. We pray in order that the covering which still veils the reality of the Kingdom be removed, in order that the reality of everything already changed in Jesus Christ may be made visible. All of God's depth is there. This is the fact beside which nothing else can be measured. Our personal life and

that of our family, the life of the Churches, the political events, all these are the covering. The reality is beneath it. We do not yet see face to face; we see, as in a mirror, indistinct reflections. We cannot be sure of our position when we read the newspapers, religious or otherwise. For us to see the reality, thy Kingdom must come, Jesus Christ must become visible, even as he was visible at Easter, even as he revealed himself to his apostles. He will be, he is already now, the head of the new mankind in the new world. We know this, but we do not yet see it. We wait to see it; we walk by faith, not yet by sight.

May the light of God which was in Jesus Christ, in his life, in his death and resurrection, be shed over us, over our whole life, and over all things. May the secret of earthly life be revealed. This secret has already been revealed, but we do not yet see it. Hence this anxiety in which we live, these cares, these exaggerations, these despairs. We do not understand. And we pray that we may be granted the power to see and to understand.

Now let us return to the exegesis of the Reformers. When we pray, may we also receive the power to see, right now, at least the first signs of this new age, of this victory which has already been won. May the dawn of this universal day enable us to see ourselves and others as well as the events of our history, in the light of that which is coming ahead of us. This general revelation, this *apokalypsis* (I Peter 1:3-12) will be given to us. May our faith in Him who has come be made alive. It cannot be so unless it is founded on the event of the past, and unless it looks toward what is coming, toward that which will reveal the universality of his work. May we receive the gift of living that hope. One cannot say, "Thy kingdom come!" without hope for our time, for to-

day, for tomorrow. The great Future, with a capital *F*, is also a future with a small *f*. That is enough to make us understand, at least in a small way, the total insufficiency of all our works in the present, the pettiness of all the conflicts in which we struggle, especially in our personal, psychological conflicts, which basically cannot be justified. But in order to understand this, we must see the Kingdom which is to come. The psychologists cannot help us. Someday the sun will rise, knowledge will be given us. We are waiting only until Easter becomes for the world a general event. We shall then no longer have need of psychologists, because there will be health. It is amazing to note how we Swiss—with even more naïveté than the other modern Europeans—are interested in psychology, whereas in Germany, for instance, all these conflicts have disappeared because of the immediacy of life with all its exigencies. When life is there, we have no more psychological problems.

We pray in order that we may receive the gift of seeing the uselessness of this tragic sense which befits the pagans, not the Christians. May we live at once in tranquillity, in good humor, and in the love that constrains no one, but which may in some way attract people.

A variant reading of the Lord's Prayer in Luke's text (Codex D) adds, "Thy Holy Spirit come upon us, and purify us." It is an interesting variant, although only the traditional texts of Matthew and Luke are authentic. Nevertheless, this is a commentary well adapted to the text. If one prays for the coming of God's Kingdom, one prays also that the Holy Spirit may come within us. The Reformers explained the second petition as if they had taken this variant into account. Indeed they were right, but this cannot be done unless the words "thy kingdom" are understood to mean something quite different from a perfect Church; un-

less they are understood as the end of that which is now and as the advent of a new state of things. Fortunately, in the Kingdom of God there will no longer be need of the Church, for Jesus Christ will have finished what he has begun.

We must still pray to God, for it is his cause that matters. His commandments are a constant reminder of his patience with us. During the disquieting time of the exercise of his patience, while we are still separated from the coming of his Kingdom, how necessary it is for God to have his say, for him to make this bell ring! Yes, this time must come to an end! May God fulfill his promises, and may we lay hold of them as promises of God. "Thy kingdom come"—this Kingdom that has already come. Such is our prayer, simple, quite close to him, habitual.



"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

We return to the present, which, like the past, belongs also to the realm of God's will, the realm in which is carried out the plan he has made to legitimize himself, to glorify himself as Creator and as Lord; and at the same time to justify and glorify his creature. This creature, in comparison to him, is small, weak, and threatened by many dangers, prone to failure because it is contaminated by sin, lost, reduced to nought. But the will of God is to maintain his creature, to save it, and to fulfill his work by the manifestation of his Kingdom.

"Thy will . . ." Let the plan be executed, let its consummation come to pass now, between the beginning and the

end. May this time we are living out not be in vain. The fulfillment cannot be our own. It is not we who do this will of God. To him belong the plan and its execution, to him belongs the time, both the present and the future — all the categories of time. Thus we find ourselves faced with a third object of prayer: may God deign to trouble himself with us and with this world; may he not tire, not cease being patient; may he continue to reign until the end. Yet while praying thus, we must know that this is taking place, that God is engaged in carrying out his will, in accomplishing it. We pray the "Our Father" in communion with Jesus Christ, and we know consequently that his will is already done.

"As . . . in heaven . . ." I hope I do not misinterpret these words. Thy will is already done, according to thy intentions, eternal God. It has been done, it will be done, and it will further unfold itself in time. But before now this will has been done in him, in the mystery of what has taken place and of what is taking place with him. It has been done in his creation, in his governing of the world since the beginning; in the history of his covenant, which faithfully expresses the meaning of all events — the covenant such as it was understood by the prophets and the apostles and whose testimony was given us in Jesus Christ. It is thy will even as thou knowest it, even as thy angels see it, even as it is "at thy right hand"; even as we believe it (although we do not see it). It is done and it is being done ceaselessly in heaven.

It is being done as it must be done, in the full knowledge of the case; it is being done without let or hindrance, in complete freedom, in such a manner that grace alone prevails and thankfulness on the part of the creature makes

answer to it. It is so done in Jesus Christ. In heaven it is perfectly fulfilled. And on account of Jesus Christ we know it. His Spirit teaches and confirms it to us. His will is done and is always being done.

We have therefore the more reason to pray that his will be done "on earth" as it is in heaven. May its execution be realized in our world and in our lives, according to what we know of it, according to what it appears to be with the covering. May the fulfillment of his will become consonant on earth with its fulfillment in heaven: *In terra sicut in caelo*. This means: may the chiaroscuro, this mixture of our secular and ecclesiastical history, this mixture of sanctity and stupidity, of wisdom and vulgarity, which characterizes much of our existence — may all this confusion be dispelled. In heaven his will is perfectly done. Why not among us? May this chiaroscuro not last forever; may we cease misunderstanding, thwarting thy intentions. May we cease contradicting and falsifying thy Gospel again and again, in an attempt to make of it a new kind of law. May we renounce behaving like bad servants. May we employ thy patience for our conversion instead of toying with a humanistic Christianity and a Christian humanism, instead of continually provoking thy wrath. In the execution of thy plan, liberate us from this endless imperfection of our obedience. Come to give us freedom and, someday, extricate us from these contradictions in which we find ourselves — we who know that thy will is done and how it is done in heaven.

Once more it is God's cause that is in question. And we participate in his cause even as he participates in ours. His cause cannot be foreign to us. We are in the present, within time. Now, this time is very short; life passes very quickly. There is not a moment to lose — and we lose so many! What can be expected of the world if we Christians are so

abstractedly earthly, so complacent in our imperfection, so much at ease when it should not be possible for us to be? God reigns. We pray that he may let us reign with him. No less than that.



THE LAST THREE PETITIONS

First let us note the change of attitude in the second part of the Lord's Prayer, which begins with the request, "Give us." In the first three petitions our prayer is a sort of conversation with the Heavenly Father. It is like a sigh. We are dazzled by the grandeur of what occupies us: the name, the Kingdom, the will of God himself. We sigh and pray from a certain distance, in a manner almost indirect: "Thy name. Thy kingdom . . . , Thy will." With the last three petitions we come to prayer properly speaking. Nevertheless, as we shall notice, this real change is in keeping with the first three petitions.

Here we shall make two remarks:

1. The "*us*" of the Lord's Prayer now becomes explicit and audible. Eight times in these three verses we find the words "our," "we," or "us." We recall that the "*us*" of the "Our Father" is, so to speak, created by the invitation, the command of Jesus Christ, "Follow me." The "*us*" means those who wish to learn to pray with Jesus Christ.

Apropos of this "*us*," let us note four points:

a. The "*us*" refers to the brotherhood of men who are with Jesus Christ, the God-Man, who permits and commands them to join him, to join in his own intervention with God, to pray with him.

b. It is the "*us*" of the brotherhood which unites men

together at the same time as they are united with Jesus Christ, united together by this permission and this command. It is, however, not a closed brotherhood; it is open in the sense that it is involved in this world, that it represents the world, if "world" is understood to mean all those who have not yet heard and followed the Lord's invitation.

c. The "us" of these last three petitions concerns the unified community, which thinks and acts in solidarity; which knows, through a deep experience, the misery of the human condition. However, in the midst of this distress, of which it is aware, the community is free to address itself to God in communion with Jesus Christ, who is raised from the dead, and in common accord with those who make up his community; it is free to address itself to our Father who is in heaven, to the sovereign Creator, Lord, and Saviour, in order to obtain from him a complete and final deliverance, knowing that this Sovereign can and will grant it.

d. It is the "us" of those who — because they are united with Jesus Christ crucified and because they have the freedom to pray with him as members of God's family — on account of this fact alone know what is their own misery and the misery of the world, the profound malignity and the incurable sadness of human existence, the fall and perdition of God's good creature. They know the inability of man to extricate himself from this situation by his own resolves, by his own efforts; they know the unconditional necessity of submitting themselves to God, of trusting God alone; in short, they grasp the impossibility of living otherwise than in free grace. Observe that "us" means those who implicitly, in an inaudible way, have already prayed the first three petitions, which were concerned with the glory and

the cause of God himself. In these last three petitions, it is the same people ("us") who come forward with their own cause.

2. A second remark: In these three petitions, prayer now becomes explicit, direct, and imperative. It is one thing to pray: "Thy name. Thy kingdom . . . , Thy will," and another thing to say: "Give us this day . . . forgive us . . . lead us not . . . deliver us." Notice the boldness, I shall even say the temerity, of this appeal. Here is the man who dares to importune God, asking him to concern himself with human affairs; here is the man who allows himself such imperative language. How can this be done? We reply: We are the only ones to whom it is permitted, nay, even commanded, in the first three petitions, to concern ourselves with God's affairs, with the hallowing of his name, with the coming of his Kingdom, with the doing of his will. Is this our concern? Yes, certainly. We are permitted to attend to it. God has accepted us as co-workers (this is a Biblical expression). He has made his cause our own. And now, as a consequence of these first three petitions, our appeal to God becomes, so to speak, quite natural in the three that follow. We say: "Our Father, here we are just as thou findest us, exactly as we are, and, it well seems, in the state in which thou desirest to meet us. Here we are, engrossed in thy cause (we presume that our prayer is earnest), kindled by the ardent desire to see thy name hallowed. We have no other task; this is our care. It is not a question of our being able to help ourselves. Any preoccupation of this kind could only be infidelity, disloyalty, disobedience. Therefore, to thee we hand over our existence — to thee, who hast invited and commanded us to pray, to live for thy cause.

Here we are. It is now up to thee to concern thyself with our human cause."

From this springs the audacity of these three petitions. They express such an action on our part. When we ask God to give us all we need, both outwardly and inwardly, for our existence, we comply with his command to serve him for the sake of his glory.

In the first three petitions, Jesus Christ asks us to join with him in his fight for God's cause, and at the same time he invites us to share in his victory over the world, over everything that could hinder the realization of the sighs that are uttered in these petitions. Jesus Christ has vanquished, and he invites us now to participate in his victory. In order that we may have the freedom to utter these sighs: "Thy name. Thy kingdom . . . , Thy will," we avail ourselves of the invitation that Jesus Christ extends to us for the partaking of his victory. Herein lies the good and true reason for what I have called the boldness, the temerity, of this appeal: "Give us . . . forgive us"; this is the reason for our daring to accost God in this manner. For this appeal is astonishing, let us admit. It cannot be made except in the liberty that issues from the pledge we make as children of God, brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

These are the two essential aspects of what I call the change of attitude between the two parts of the Lord's Prayer. This change is, after all, only the consequence of the freedom that dominates the first part of the Lord's Prayer.



Let us now proceed to the interpretation. We must not forget, however, that any development can be only tentative. We shall follow the same order as previously: first, the ex-

planation of terms; then, the way in which God hears and has already heard this prayer; and, finally, an examination of the prayer itself.

We must recall that the Reformers, Luther and Calvin, never ceased emphasizing this point: God has already heard our prayer, and on account of this fact we have the freedom and we receive the command to pray. No petition of the Lord's Prayer can be understood in any other way.

"[Give us this day] our daily bread."

By the words "our . . . bread," some of the Reformers have included (and we can do so with them) all that we need for existence.

Those who are acquainted with Luther's Small Catechism will remember the famous list that he draws up to explain the meaning of the word "bread": food, drink, clothes, shoes, houses, farms, fields, lands, money, property, a good marriage, good children, honest and faithful public servants, a just government, favorable weather (neither too hot nor too cold!), health, honors, good friends, loyal neighbors. That is no small order! This list contains the necessities and requirements for the life of a German "bourgeois" farmer in the sixteenth century. And nothing hinders us from interpreting and expanding it according to the needs of our time and of our individual situations. We are certainly permitted to think of our daily bread in the wide sense of the term. Nevertheless, I wish to emphasize that it is advisable for us not to lose sight of the original word "bread" in all its simplicity. In the Biblical language "bread" has two meanings:

1. It is the strict necessity for life, the minimum nourishment which the poor man cannot do without; it is the neces-

sary minimum for the beggar, for the tramp. It is opposed to the idea of hunger. Asking God to give us bread means having recourse to his free grace, which upholds and maintains us at the brink of the abyss of hunger and death. This minimum allows us to live today. Shall we have it tomorrow also? This is the vital question. Now we live on it. But tomorrow? No one knows. There is no guarantee that God will give us this necessary bread and, with our bread, life. The children of God know this precariousness of our existence and of the human situation in general. Whether rich or poor, they know that we are a people in the wilderness; we are this people of Israel preoccupied with the cause of God. This is why we dare to ask him to save us from hunger and death. We ask it in this utterly primitive form, "bread," because we should not take it for granted that we shall have it tomorrow.

2. In the Old and New Testaments the word "bread" is also the temporal sign of God's eternal grace. The word contains a meaning at once far more simple, natural, and material, and at the same time far more profound and sublime than we suppose. These qualities of the natural and the sublime are intimately linked. They are a sign from God, given to this people in the wilderness, given to the poor, the afflicted, those who are hungry and thirsty, those who are in the jaws of death. On account of this, bread is something sacred. Bread is the promise, and not only the promise but also the mysterious presence, of this food which nourishes for once and for all. Bread is the mysterious presence of this food which, after it has been eaten, does not need to be replaced. In the Bible each meal, whether it be modest or sumptuous, is something sacred, for it is the promise of an eternal banquet, of an everlasting

feast. In the Bible bodily and temporal life is sacred because it is the promise of the life immortal and eternal.

This word "bread," as we have seen, is put in juxtaposition with the word "hunger." But it is also associated with that fullness of life which we shall know in the new era, in the world to come. This real bread which we eat is the pledge and also the sign—and at the same time as it is the sign, it is the presence—of this fullness. This is what is called here "our bread." "Give us . . . our . . . bread" means then: "Give us this minimum which is necessary for the present moment; and at the same time, give it to us as a sign, as a pledge anticipating our whole life. According to thy promise, which we are receiving at this moment, we receive also the presence of thine eternal goodness, the assurance that we shall live with thee."

Considerable discussion has been raised on the subject of the adjective "daily." This word presents all sorts of enigmas; these problems I shall not bring up here. I shall merely suggest to you the most probable answer. *Epiousios* (daily) means, "For each day, for the coming day." Give us today our bread for each day, the bread that we shall need tomorrow. We live in the present, but shall we be alive at the next minute, the next day? Until then will hunger and thirst spare us? This is the concrete question which confronts us with the precariousness of our condition. You will recall that in Matt., ch. 6, Jesus exhorts us not to be anxious about our life, what we shall eat or what we shall drink. Calvin was certainly correct when he added in his Commentary, "We must work well in order to assure our food of the morrow."

However, neither anxiety nor work provides an answer to this question, Shall we be alive tomorrow? Prayer must take the place of anxiety and form the basis of work for the

morrow. The children of God are not anxious about work. They work because they pray.

But is it not at this point that the other meaning of the word "bread" must intervene? Anxiety for the temporal morrow prefigures anxiety for the eternal morrow. For this temporal precariousness cannot be compared to the precariousness of human destiny. "What then shall I say, poor man that I am?" as it is written in the requiem. May this fear be transformed and may it become a prayer. The children of God, who know the uncertainty of human life and all that is for us an object of fear in time and in eternity, hope to receive today, yes, today, with their bread and in the form of earthly bread, the pledge, even the first fruits, of the bread that will feed them eternally, that will feed them on this eschatological morrow.

Let us now look into the meaning of the whole sentence. Praying God to give us our bread both earthly and celestial, both substantial and suprasubstantial, presupposes that we know God as the giver. We have already said that in order to pray with full knowledge of the case, we must pray with the certainty of a reply. Praying at random, without this certainty, is not praying. Therefore, our prayer must begin with this implication: Thou givest us our bread for tomorrow, yes, thou givest it us today. Thou art our faithful Creator, and thou dost not cease being so for an instant. We are a people in the wilderness, and yet we find ourselves surrounded by the splendors and the riches of creation, and by all the creatures, and by this covenant of grace which thou hast desired to establish between thyself and us. Thou desirest not our death, but our life.

On thy side, in what concerns thee, absolutely nothing can be lacking. There is abundant bread for us and for all

those who might unite with us in this prayer; there is abundant bread for everyone. No risk other than hunger and death can surprise us. Thou art ready to maintain all whom thou hast willed to call for the service of thy glory. Everything thou givest us is truly the pledge of a living food, of this fullness in which we shall live eternally. This we know because thou art our Father in heaven, our Father in Jesus Christ, with whom we live. He has called us to follow him. We accompany him, for the moment from afar — nevertheless, we accompany him. And since thou art his Father, thou art also ours; on this account we know that thou hast prepared for us the meal, the complete feast, both temporal and eternal. We listen to thy voice, which invites us to be the guests of thy table. We need to hear this voice which summons us, and we cannot forget it: "Come; for all is now ready." This is what impels us to pray and gives us the freedom to say to God, "Give us this day our daily bread."

We must also say: "Act in such a way that thou dost not give it us in vain, so that we may truly receive this bread which thou hast prepared on thy table in the holy Communion, so that we may take from thy hands this bread which thou hast created for us and which thou givest us. Help us, then; illumine us. May we not behave like well-satisfied bourgeois or like greedy creatures at the moment when thou bestowest upon us anew this incomprehensible and incomparable gift, this gift of thy patience, and of our hope. Act in such a way that we do not squander and destroy this gift. Grant that each one may receive his bread without dispute or quarrel. Grant that if anyone has a surplus of this bread, he may know by this very fact that he is appointed as a servant, as a dispenser of thy grace, that he is in thy service and in the service of others. And grant that those who are particularly threatened by hunger, death, and

this precariousness of the human condition, may meet brothers and sisters who have open eyes and ears and feel their responsibility. How shameful is our social ingratitude and injustice! How senseless it is that in this humanity surrounded by thy gifts there are people still dying of hunger!

"Act in such a way that we may receive the food essential to us, that we may receive it as thou givest it to us, that is, as a sign and a promise. And while we are using the fruits of this sign, while we are blessing thee ('Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits'), may we enjoy beforehand the presence of the things that thou dost promise to us, and already today may we participate in this feast which thou wilt preside over from everlasting to everlasting."

As you see, there is reason to pray! Yes, it is our cause that is at stake. We are entirely dependent upon God. He really must make our cause his own, so that it may be upheld and victorious. And we are there, we, who are free to invoke him fearlessly, with the certainty that he listens. For whatever we ask of him he has always done and will always do.



"*Forgive us our offenses* [debts]."

What we translate in French as *nos offenses* means literally, "our faults," that is to say, it suggests that we are in default in our relation to God, in what we owe him. We have a debt due to him, and if we cannot pay it, we remain in default. If one does not fulfill an incumbent obligation, one is in default. One may be righteous, nevertheless one is guilty. The result is that we offend him with whom we are at fault.

We are God's debtors. We owe him, not something, whether it be little or much, but, quite simply, our person in its totality; we owe him ourselves, since we are his creatures, sustained and nourished by his goodness. We, his children, called by his word, admitted to the service of his glorification — we, brothers of the man Jesus Christ — come short of what we owe to God. What we are and what we do correspond in no wise to what is given us. We are his children and we know not how to recognize it. Calvin says, "Whoever refuses to confess that we offend God, as debtors who do not pay, excludes himself from Christianity." And Luther, "Before God everyone is compelled to lower his plumes." Thus, in Christianity we acknowledge this state of things, and we find ourselves incapable of setting it right. While we avail ourselves of his invitation and try to obey, in doing these things, we who pray mingle in them our own ideas, our own inclinations, our ethics, our religion, and we find ourselves obliged to admit ever anew that we are unworthy to serve him. When we look at ourselves, we know we are without hope before him.

For even when we live as Christians, we increase our debt, we aggravate the "mess" of our situation. It grows from day to day. And I think that the older one becomes, the more one realizes that there is no hope for us. Matters go from bad to worse. We find ourselves rejected at the very beginning of the Lord's Prayer and confronted by this question: How can we have the audacity to draw near to God? In showing our zeal for his cause and then in flaunting before him our own needs, who are we to have the pretense of being co-workers with God? And who are we to say to God: "Take care of me, of us! Give us!" We who are his debtors! Once again everything seems to be called into question.

What does the word "forgive" mean? In the pure, ideal sense, it signifies, "Regard our debtor as though he had done us no wrong." It means not imputing to him his fault, not holding rigorously against him this guilt in which he finds himself, in which he sees himself. On the contrary, let us turn over a new leaf with him, give him another chance. "Forgive us"! This request excludes any sort of pretense on our part. It debars us from the right, no matter how small, of making any claim whatever with God. Neither man's debt nor man himself as debtor can be pardoned. Man is insolvent. He has no right to claim remission of his debt. The right of placing the guilty again in the position of children of God can belong only to him whom we have offended; this can be only the right of the creditor or of the sovereign, of this King whom we have deceived, in whose service we have defaulted and we still default. This right can belong only to the free mercy of God. We ask of God, then, that he be willing to use this right which is in his grace. We can have confidence in him. But without totally renouncing all rights whatever on our part, we should not know how to pray as we ought.

"As we also forgive those who have offended us [As we also have forgiven our debtors]."

Does this sentence imply a kind of previous condition which we should set for ourselves in order to obtain God's forgiveness? No, it is a criterion necessary for our understanding of God's pardon. For whoever knows that he is cast upon the mercy of God, that he cannot exist without the divine forgiveness—whoever has lived such an experience—cannot do otherwise than to forgive his fellow men, those who have offended him (we are all offenders, debtors one to another, and we are so daily). Even if the

debts of our offenders appear to us to be very heavy, they are always infinitely lighter than ours with God. How could we, who ourselves are such great debtors, hope to have the divine forgiveness if we did not of ourselves wish to do this small thing, namely, to forgive those who have offended us? The hope one entertains for oneself necessarily opens the heart, the feeling, and the judgment, in respect to others. To know how to forgive is not a merit, a moral effort, or a sort of virtue. How irritating are those people who, with a perpetual smile, run after you to forgive you!

Human forgiveness is a beautiful thing, an almost physical necessity. In the light of the divine forgiveness, we see those poor creatures who have offended us, and even in difficult cases we think that, after all, the matter is not so serious. Let us not settle down to enjoy the offenses done to us; let us not nurse our grudges with pleasure. Rather, let us retain some humor with respect to our offenders. Let us have toward others this small impulse of forgiveness, of freedom. This act must not be looked upon as a piece of moral armor belonging to a good Christian knight. It is neither a helmet nor a saber which could make us bold and strong, but something that must be natural. He who does not have this very small freedom is not within reach of divine forgiveness. It might be said of him that he does not know how to pray, that he cannot then receive anything. Thus, we are not faced with an exhortation: "Go, forgive"; but we are confronted by a simple recognition of a fact: when the pardon of God is received, it enables us to forgive. The pardon of God is something that occurs at the divine level. One cannot draw a comparison with what happens at the human level; nevertheless, on that plane this little matter of forgiving offenses must come to pass.

How shall I hope for something for myself if I do not even grant it to my neighbor?

I cannot escape the obligation of giving this small token! And by so doing I shall not make myself worthy to receive God's forgiveness. I shall simply validate my hope and my prayer.

What God's forgiveness is must be clearly understood. Here it is not a question of an uncertain hope, of an ideal to be sought or imagined. It is a fact. Even before I ask it, God has already granted his pardon. He who does not know that prays in vain. Forgiveness is already given, and this is the reality by which we live.

"Our Father who art in heaven . . ." Yes, thou hast forgiven us our offenses. Before I say to thee, "Forgive me," thou hast established and announced thy right of pardon, the justice of thy mercy, thy right of overlooking our faults and of not regarding us as offenders. In thy Son thou hast exchanged the roles between thyself, the holy and just God, and us, perfidious and unjust men. Thou hast put thyself in our place so as to re-establish order in our favor. Thou hast obeyed and suffered for us; thou hast abolished our faults, the faults of all mankind. And thou hast done it once and for all.

Thou hast annulled our faults, which accompany us from the moment of our birth until our death, and also those we commit each day, at every instant, in one manner or another: Thou hast annulled those faults that we know only too well and also the others that we do not know how to see and that will be revealed one day when the account book is presented. Then we shall see ourselves as we are in thy sight. Thou hast abolished all these faults; thou hast begotten a new man (a new "us" and a new "me") with-

out faults, without offenses — a man well-pleasing to thee, who is upright in thy eyes, pure and spotless, without reproach. Thou hast begotten this man and thou hast brought us together around him, around the cross of thy Son, in order that we may be witnesses at our own judgment, because we must indeed take part in this judgment, in this death which he endured in our place, for our liberation.

Thou hast given us thy Holy Spirit in order that the work of this creation which thou hast accomplished in this new man, Jesus Christ, may become a living thing in us; in order that thy grace, displayed in this event, may become ours. Because thou hast done all this in thy Son, and because thou hast acted by thy Holy Spirit, thou allowest us no longer to doubt, to remain in uncertainty and uneasiness, in the presence of our offenses. Henceforth our faults are thy concern, not ours. Thou forbiddest us to look backward, to feel ourselves overwhelmed as though chained to our past, to what we are and do today, and even to what we shall be and do tomorrow.

This habit of always casting our eyes on our own sin, instead of looking up to thee, is gone. Thou hast severed us from this past. In Jesus Christ thou hast made me a new creature. Thou permittest and commandest me to look ahead. We shall not live by taking lightly what we are or do, or what we have been and have done; nor shall we live by putting all our trust in what we shall be and do. On the contrary, we shall live by being always on guard, in the knowledge that we are and always shall be judged, and also by putting our trust in thee and in what thou hast done, in this judgment that thou hast pronounced, in this death that thou hast suffered for us. It is a question of something already fulfilled (*tetelesthai*).

However, this perfect tense is also for us a future tense which thou hast procured for us. We have only to walk on this road which lies open in the direction of our future. By forgiving us thou hast given us the freedom to travel on it.

Nevertheless, we must thoroughly understand that it is not possible for us to speak seriously in this fashion with God, nor to receive his pardon, unless we pray, "Forgive us our offenses." It is now a matter of tending toward this perfect future. It is up to us to believe, to realize this beginning which was inaugurated by the death of Jesus Christ.

May we, therefore, live our life such as it is, that is to say, united with his; may we take our place where he has placed us, where we are in reality, where he has suffered, obeyed, and lived for us. May we put on this new man whom God has begotten in Christ. May we not live in just any way, but in the reality of what God has done for us. May we not vex the Holy Spirit when he assures us that we are thy children and that we are thine not by our own merits but on account of thy free mercy, because thou hast vanquished sin in the flesh and exalted thy poor creature to the heights of heaven. May thy forgiveness sanctify us ever increasingly in spite of all that we have been, in spite of what we still are and shall be. We know that our sanctity will never be other than thine and that it will triumph out of our distress, out of all our impurities. Yes, may thy forgiveness sanctify us until that day when, with the return of thy Son, thou wilt reveal to us for the last time, displayed in thy light, all wherein we have failed, our turpitude, our faults, all that we have hidden. But, more important still, thou wilt reveal to us thy right to forgive us, the justice of thy mercy, which has prevailed over our misery. "Forgive us": give us today and all the

days which thy patience still grants us, to live in the freedom of this forgiveness which thou hast bestowed upon us.

Yes, there is reason to pray! And if we reflect upon this forgiveness which we must grant to others, how much more we feel that we must pray. For, if we refuse to make this small gesture, we are far from having laid hold of the divine forgiveness.

Thus, in the fifth petition, we confess our bankruptcy; and if anyone is unwilling to do so, he must give up asking God's forgiveness. We must recognize that our own cause is lost, and if we do, it becomes for us a victorious cause, for it is then in the hands of Him who has forgiven and who still forgives.



"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One [evil]."

We deal here with the great temptation. It is a question not only of evil, but of the Evil One.

There are some minor temptations, sins that do not lead unto death—I should almost say provisional temptations—which God sends us daily and which vary according to our age, some for youth, some for the less youthful, and some for the aged. God visits them upon us because they are necessary to us. They are temptations that we can resist. In The Epistle of James it is even written that they can be an object of joy: "Blessed is the man who endures trial" (James 1:12). There are evils that cause suffering inwardly and outwardly, that are perhaps severe and highly undesirable; however, on close scrutiny, they can be endured. One may even say with Paul that they work together for

the good of those who love God. We must not ask to be spared at any cost from those temptations, from those evils. We should be wrong to tell God: "Do not make me pass through the trials which Job, David, and all the saints have endured, even though thou hast willed it in thy design, which is always good." We are wrong when we cry, "Deliver us from any possible danger or cause for sorrow." In the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer we are not concerned with evils of this sort, with these minor temptations, which are of a relative and bearable nature.

There is, nevertheless, the great temptation, the eschatological temptation, which may, of course, be manifested in a minor temptation, but which is intrinsically something else; it is the work of the Evil One. Moral and physical trials may, in fact, be identified with it; they may be the expression of its deadly action. However, one must distinguish between the two, for here it is not a matter of an ordinary threat which might be clearly perceived and resisted. It is rather a question of the infinite menace of the nothingness that is opposed to God himself. It is the menace that, for the creature, carries with it not only a passing danger, a destruction of secondary importance, a momentary corruption, but total fall, ultimate extinction. This is the supreme temptation. In it there is nothing good, nothing that can be of any use to us. It is without fruits, and if it reaches us, one cannot say of it, "Rejoice." It is without hope. There is an intolerable, unendurable evil that in no way competes with the good. This threat exists; it manifests its presence. This supreme and infinite evil does not belong to creation. There are some evils pertaining to creation; as we have said, they are relative and bearable. But this one is not part of that which God has willed and created. It is at the limits of his creation, on the left

side, even as God himself is on the limits of it on the right. This absolute evil imposes itself upon creation in the form that we all recognize, namely, sin and death. It appears in the illegitimate dominion, incomprehensible and inexplicable, of the one whom the Scriptures call the Devil. The creature is defenseless in the face of this threat. God is superior to it, but not the creature. Once given entrance, the Devil performs endless ravages against which we have no other protection than God's. Wherever God is absent, wherever he is not the master, it is the other one who dominates. There is no alternative.

Our Reformers, Luther as well as Calvin, were acquainted not only with the small temptations but also with the great one. They knew it was with the Devil that they had to deal. For him they had no respect, since he is not respectable. But they knew that he exists. They did not reckon only with the malice of men, the pope and all those who opposed their action. No, they knew that there is not merely the opposition of men. There is the Evil One, who makes evil everything that preoccupies us and causes us anxiety. God's enemy is also the enemy of God's creature. In order for us rightly to pray this last petition, we must know that the Reformers held the correct view.

Far from me be the idea of preaching the Devil to you. One cannot preach him, and I do not at all intend to cause you anguish. Nevertheless, there is in this matter a reality that we modern Christians pass over too lightly. There exists a superior, ineluctable enemy whom we cannot resist unless God comes to our aid. I do not care for demonology, nor for the manner in which it is treated in Germany today and perhaps elsewhere. Ask me no questions about the Demon, for I am not an authority on the subject! However, it is necessary for us to know that the

Devil exists, but then we must hasten to get away from him.

We pray thee, our Father, to lead us in such a way that it may be given us to avoid this limit on the left, this pernicious boundary. Lead us, for we are thy children, saved through Jesus Christ. Spare us not from struggle (which we must accept), not from sufferings (which we must endure), but spare us from the encounter with this enemy, who is stronger than all our strength, more clever than our intelligence (including the intelligence we put into our theology), more dangerously sentimental—for the Devil is also sentimental—than we ourselves are capable of being. He is more pious (yes, the Devil is pious too) than all our Christian piety, both ancient and modern, or theological. Shield us from all possibility of evil from which we know not how to preserve ourselves, since it would utterly and irrevocably degrade us to the level of brutes.

For us this is not one temptation among many others, not one a shade more sad and somber, but it is the supreme temptation, whereby the impossible becomes possible.

“Deliver us from the Evil One.” We perceive and feel his power. To tell the truth, it is only a pseudo power. It is not a real power. The terrible thing about it is that it acts, although this action is unreal. It is useless to minimize it even though it is unreal. The danger lies in the fact that it is a sly, insidious power. Yet it reigns in a sense that is only too real. It has power over us because we are sinners. We have yielded to it. We are in the jaws of death. We complain of it, we suffer from it, but we cannot break loose.

The Greek word means not only “deliver us” but “snatch us from these jaws.” In the Old Testament the psalms resound from beginning to end with the cry, “Snatch us.” And Christianity takes up this cry in the

sixth petition. For it is acquainted with this enemy, because it knows Jesus Christ. It knows that he has affronted not only the ill will of man but also the enemy of God and of his creature. There had to be the Son of God to unmask the sinister wickedness of the enemy. That is why the Lord's Prayer ends with this *de profundis*. If our prayer is not terminated by this *de profundis*, it does not answer what Jesus Christ has taught us.

However, this final petition also presupposes what we well know about this danger on the left: God has already done what we ask him. He has done it before we have even thought of praying thus, before we have formulated this petition: "Lead us not into temptation." Now, God does not drive us into this temptation. No, our Father, thou dost not do it. How couldst thou do it, thou who hast revealed thyself in thy Son? Thou art not double-faced. Thy attitude toward the great temptation is not equivocal; it is categorical. Thy resistance to it is clear and forthright. Thus it has been since the first day of creation, ever since thou hast said: "Let there be light!" Thou, our Father, hast no acquaintance with evil, thou knowest no compromise with it, thou dost not tolerate it. The threat of nothingness will never be a threat coming from thee; it will never be tolerated or admitted by thee. On the contrary, by directing us in thy paths, in the paths of thy gifts, of thy pardon, thou wilt never lead us to the left, but always to the right. We can be sure that when we follow thy word, we shall not be led into the great temptation. By following the path which thou hast prepared for us and which thou hast revealed in thy Son, we shall always be shielded from this aberration. Thou wilt deliver us from the Evil One.

Art thou not God the Liberator? One alone is able to

liberate us in a decisive manner. It is thou. We know now that thou art the great liberator. Thou hast personally opposed thyself to the Evil One, to this usurper whose sway must be abolished because it has nothing to do with thy creation. Thou hast stepped forward to break the powers of this realm of the Devil. Thou hast caused the Devil to fall like lightning from the sky; we have seen him fall. Thou hast triumphed over the shadows by the resurrection of thy Son. Thou hast proclaimed thy victory by many signs and miracles; and thou proclaimest it still among us by baptism in the name of thy Son and by the presence of his body and his blood in the Holy Supper.

Thou hast already snatched us from those jaws. Thine be the glory! We no longer have to let ourselves be affected by the threat of the Evil One, nor do we need to fear it. And this is why we pray: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One." Be present in our midst, thou faithful and infallible guide, thou who showest us thy way and openest it before our feet. Thou art the victorious leader, before whom the Evil One is but an idiot, a ridiculous scarecrow, a nonentity.

We know that without thee this would not be so. Our paths would not be the right path. Our moral and religious excursions could never succeed. Without thee our undertakings in the conquest of temptation, evil, and the Devil would only aggravate the situation. To thee alone belongs the right to protect us, to snatch us from this position. Once again: Glory be to thee, in whom we put our trust! That is the ultimate freedom which God grants us.

There is reason to pray. Without this final petition in the Lord's Prayer and without the answer which precedes our prayer, we should not only be disabled and judged but

also reduced to nothingness. Thine be the glory! Thou hast annihilated him who wished to annihilate us. Thou hast loved us; thou still lovest us. And thy love is efficacious. It delivers once and for all.



THE DOXOLOGY

"For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever."

Of this we shall speak briefly.

These words do not belong to the original text of the Gospel. They are not authentic; there is no doubt about this. They constitute an adjunction, an enlargement, introduced for the liturgical usage of the Lord's Prayer. The congregation as a whole pronounced (or chanted) these words as a reply to the six petitions, which were said by the celebrant. But this fact does not hinder us from understanding the meaning of these words. What were the thoughts of the people in the primitive Church of the second century when at the end of the Lord's Prayer they spoke or chanted this doxology? One can see in it a relation to the sixth petition: "Deliver us from the Evil One," because the Kingdom, the power, and the glory belong to God, not to the Devil, sin, death, or hell. "For" means, "This is why we ask thee to deliver us from the Evil One, since to thee belong the Kingdom, the power, and the glory." Or, in other words, "Show us that thou art the King, powerful and glorious, by delivering us from the Evil One."

There is another explanation which does not necessarily exclude the first. These final words encompass the whole prayer. The thought would be thus: It is necessary for us

to pray, because to thee belong the Kingdom, the power, and the glory, and not to us, men, Christians, pious people. All that we ask of thee can be done only by thee. This is why we address ourselves to thee. The Heidelberg Catechism offers this explanation: "Thou art our King, the All-Powerful, who art able and willing to give us every benefit, in order that thy name may be glorified—thy name and not ours or the name of Christianity or of the Church."

"Amen."

It is enough to recall what Luther and the Heidelberg Catechism tell us about this. Luther affirms that it is a good thing to say "Amen"! In other words, it is a good thing to learn not to doubt when we pray, but to believe, because "Amen" means, "So be it." Prayer is not an undertaking left to chance, a trip into the blue. It must end as it has begun, with conviction: Yes, may it be so!

On its side, the Heidelberg Catechism declares that "Amen" means that the certainty of the divine response is greater than the certainty we feel within ourselves of our needs and our desires. Our requests are not the most certain element of our prayer, but what comes from God: his response.

